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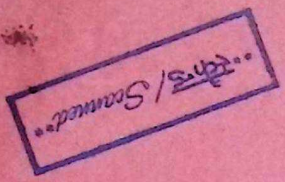

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'Adivasi' Literatures of India

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The Uncultivated 'Adivasi' Languages

INDIA IS A multi-racial, multi-lingual and multi-religious country, and in spite of this diversity in racial type, speech and religious outlook there has been all through history for the last 3000 years a great tendency towards an integration of these diverse elements—integration into one single type which can be called *pan-Indian.* Of course, there has not been in many cases a complete assimilation. But the various elements have had their inter-play in the evolution of Indian life, culture and religion, as well as to a large extent of a common Indian physical type as much as of a common Indian mentality.

These four racio-linguistic groups have met and flourished in India—the *Austric*, the *Sino-Tibetan,* the *Dravidian,* and finally the *Aryan.* (It has been suggested by some that over and above these four groups, there might have been one or two more—there seems to be some evidence from linguistics for this idea. But nothing definitely has as yet been found out, and we are quite content to look upon these four groups as the basic ones in the Indian scene.)

Of these linguistic and cultural groups, the Aryan is the most important, both numerically and intrinsically. As a matter of fact, Indian civilisation has found its expression primarily through the Aryan speech as it developed through the centuries—through Vedic Sanskrit, then through Classical Sanskrit, then Early Middle Indo-Aryan dialects like Pali and Old Ardha-Magadhi, then Buddhist and Jaina Sanskrit and after that the various Prakrits and Apabhramsas, and finally, in the last phase, of the different Modern Indo-Aryan languages of the country. After the Aryan speech, Dravidian has also very largely functioned as the exponent of Indian culture—particularly the earlier secular as well as religious literature of Tamil, which has some special characteristics of

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its own within the Indian orbit. The other two groups, Austric and Sino-Tibetan, do not show any high literary development—excepting in the case of two important speeches of the Sino-Tibetan group, namely Newari of Nepal and Meithei or Manipuri of Manipur. These have quite respectable as well as interesting literatures which are fairly old, and some notes on these are necessary. The Lepcha language, spoken in the state of Sikkim and the district of Darjeeling, according to Robert Shafer, the great American authority on Sino-Tibetan languages, really belongs to the Naga group within the Sino-Tibetan family; and Lepcha had developed its own special alphabet with a small literature of Buddhistic inspiration (this alphabet has now become almost extinct).

All the other languages of the Sino-Tibetan family and also of the Austric family were in a backward state, as the speakers of these were in a comparatively primitive condition in their way of life. Of couse, they had some kind of village or folk *culture*, but no *civilisation*. Connected with this culture there developed in all these languages a slight modicum of folk-literature—of songs, religious and otherwise, of folk-tales, and of their legends and traditions. These were never written down as they lacked any system of writing. This the Aryan and Dravidian languages had possessed from very early times. A serious study of these Sino-Tibetan and Austric languages (with the exception of Newari and Manipuri, and of course of Chinese, Tibetan and Siamese) began only during the middle of the 19th century when European scholars—anthropologists and linguists—as well as European Christian missionaries of various denominations (like Roman Catholics from Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, England and Ireland, German Lutherans, Scandinavian Lutherans, English Anglicans, Scottish Presbyterians, and Welsh Methodists) began to study these languages and take in hand the preparation of a Christian literature (both of translations from the Bible and other Christian sacred literature, and of original compositions to a small extent) for the purpose of converting these backward peoples into Christianity. They succeeded in doing this to a very large extent, as these peoples were neglected by the Hindu ruling classes

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who had contact with them. Their non-developed languages without any old literature, however, are now fast becoming the languages of groups of people who are becoming self-conscious; and as a result we have, during the 20th century, the beginnings of a kind of literature in some of the more important Austric and Sino-Tibetan languages which so long had no literature to boast of.

(A) The Sino-Tibetan Languages: their Classification, and the Literature available in them.

The Sino-Tibetan Speech-family extends over a very wide field in Central and Eastern Asia. As a matter of fact, some of the most important languages of Asia come within this family, which is completely independent of the other three which are also prevalant in India, viz., Aryan, Dravidian and Austric. The original Sino-Tibetan speech had as its *nidus* or area of characterisation the head-waters of the Hwang-Ho or Yellow River to the North-East of China. Here the original Sino-Tibetan speech, the ultimate source of Chinese (Ancient Chinese and its various modern forms), Tibetan and Burmese, and possibly also Siamese, had taken its form, at least 3000 years befre Christ. At present there is some diversity of opinion regarding the place of Siamese within this family—some modern scholars think that Siamese is not really a member of this family, but it is a language of another family of speech known as the Kadai family (this family now includes a few insignificant dialects of South China and Hainan Island as well as Indo-China, and it appears to be connected with the Austric or Malayo-Polynesian speeches) which has been most profoundly influenced by Sino-Tibetan. Apart from Chinese, and Siamese (which latter is now looked upon as problemetical), there are a large number of other speeches belonging to this family; and in India, these belong to the Tibeto-Burman branch of the Sino-Tibetan family, and are spoken all through the sub-Himalayan tracts, particularly in Nepal, North Bengal, parts of East Bengal, as well as in Assam. All the languages spoken by the Sino-Tibetans in India, with the single exception of Ahom, the old language spoken by the

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Ahom conquerors of Assam, which is now entirely extinct, and Singpho or Kachin, belong to the Tibeto-Burman branch. The Tibeto-Burman languages of India have been further divided into these groups, namely Bodo-Naga, Kuki-Chin, Mikir, Abor-Miri, Aka, Dafla and Singpho. As said before, with the exception of Manipuri, which belongs to the Kuki-Chin group, and Newari, which is a sub-Himalayan form of Tibeto-Burman, none out of the quite a large number of sub-Himalayan dialects of the same Tibeto-Burman group, has important literatures. The other languages, until recently, possessed no written literature,—they had only some songs and poems, religious and otherwise, and some folk-tales, stories and legends in prose, all current orally. The modern literature which had started under European and an Christian inspiration is not as yet of any value.

Below is given a tabular representation of the Sino-Tibetan speeches of India, and then a consideration of the literatures of Newari and Meithei only.

Of the Sino-Tibetan languages as indicated above, Tibetan, Burmese, Chinese and Siamese are languages with advanced literatures, particularly Chinese, which can boast of one of the richest literatures in the world. These are properly languages which do not belong to India. There are some dialects of Tibetan which are current within the boundaries of India, like for example Den-jong-ke or Sikkimese, Lho-ke or Bhutanese, Sherpa, Lahuli, and Ladakhi. Tibetan is studied in India among these peoples, particularly the classical form of it, and the large number of Tibetan refugees escaping from the Chinese regime also speak and study Tibetan. But it would not be correct to look upon Tibetan as an Indian language *par excellence*, and to give a history of Tibetan literature as part of Indian literature, although the influence of Buddhism in the evolution of Tibetan literature is quite properly within the purview of Indian studies.

Tibetan, however, has quite an extensive literature, and the beginnings of written literature in Tibetan go back to the middle of the 7th century A.D. It was during this period that the greatest ruler of Tibet in ancient times, Srong-btsan-

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sgam-po, ruled over Tibet, and he was converted to Buddhism. He married a princess of China as well as a princess of Nepal, and he had in this way intimate relations with both China and India. Buddhism was accepted by the Ruling House, and it began to spread rapidly. The Tibetan alphabet was developed out of a North Indian script during this period, and a Tibetan scholar, Thon-mi Sam-bhota, went to India and he adopted the Indian alphabet and with a few modifications employed it for Tibetan. In this way Tibetan as a literary language started its glorious career, and it became a great repository of Buddhist texts from India, both in translations from Sanskrit and other Indian languages and in commentaries written both in India and in Tibet. The entire mass of canonical (Mahayana) Buddhist literature in Tibetan is preserved in two great collections which took centuries to develop through the joint labours of both Indian and Tibetan scholars—(i) the *Bstan-Hgyur (Tan-jur)* or translations of Buddhist texts from Sanskrit and other Indian originals, and (ii) the *Bkah-Hgyur (Kanjur)* or commentaries to the above, either rendered from Indian languages or composed originally in Tibetan. These have a very great value for Buddhistic studies.

But prior to this Buddhist literature in Tibet, there was a popular literature which gave an expression to the pre-Buddhist *Bon* religion and culture of Tibet. The *National Epic of Tibet*, centering round the story of King Gesar of Gling and his wife, Queen Ḥbrug-mo, appears to have been current in the form of ballads from pre-Buddhistic times, and the beginnings of Tibetan literature would seem to go back to these ballads and other similar folk-literature. Tibet, however, has very carefully preserved its Buddhist inheritance; and the study of Buddhism and Buddhist literature, particularly Mahayana, has received a very great help from Tibetan translations and Tibetan original works on the subject.

The *Lamas (bla-ma)* or Tibetan Buddhist monks developed a great tradition of learning, and helped to develop Buddhist philosophy for the whole of the Buddhist world through their writings in Tibetan, both in abstruse philosophy and devotion, and in

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some of the technical sciences: and this was under Sanskrit and other Indian auspices.

In addition to the Buddhist literature of Indian origin (as in the *Tanjur* and *Kanjur*), Tibetan boasts of a number of historical chronicles of very great value, and also some religious and mystic poetry like the writings of Milerapa. In modern times Tibetan also is trying to forge ahead, but there has been now a very great set-back through the present unfortunate political situation in Tibet when before the onslaught of Chinese communism Tibetan Buddhist culture seems to be doomed. A small selection of poems from Rabindranath Tagore (by Suniti Kumar Pathak) is also now available in Tibetan translation.

With regard to dialects of Tibetan which are current in India, there is not much literature at the present day, although Bhutan as an independent country may be expected to create some modern literature.

Burmese is quite an important language, and some dialects of Burmese are spoken in the South-Eastern fringe of Bengal, like Arakanese, and there were settled groups of Arakan people within Bengal. Burmese literature started its career from the 11th century, and the oldest Burmese text which is in the form of an inscription goes back to about 1050 during the rule of Burma's great King Anuruddha or Aniruddha (Anowrahta). It was during his time that the Burmese language received its alphabet from the Mon or Talaing people of Central and South Burma (the Mons were Austro-Asiatic, and it was they who became the transmitters of Indian Buddhism and Indian civilisation and culture, including the Indian alphabet, to the Burmese, having themselves received them from Indians). Burmese literature also is based on Buddhistic texts, and there is a rich mass of translations from Pali and from Sanskrit into Burmese. In certain departments of literature like the Drama, Burmese had its own creations of importance, but the earlier literature right down to the 19th century was mostly religious, and to some extent romantic. In this early literature, basically pre-Buddhistic, there are the tales about the 37 *Nats* or Gods and Demi-gods and Heroes, and there has been a considerable Buddhist influence

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on these tales too. Some of the earlier Burmese dramas with a fairy-tale quality are quite beautiful. Burmese is now trying to forge ahead like a modern civilised language. In any case Burmese literature does not belong to India.

The same can be said about Thai (Siamese) literature. Siamese started its literary career from the 13th century, when the great Dai or Thai king ruling in North Siam, in the city of Sukhodaya, King Rama Gamhaeng, adopted the Cambodian alphabet for his mother-tongue Thai or Siamese, and had a long inscription carved which is the earliest document we have in Siamese, c. 1292 A.D. Modern Siamese is quite an extensive literature, not only religious i.e. Buddhistic and to some extent Brahmanical (the *Rama-kien* i.e. the *Rama-kin* or *Rama-kirtti*, the Siamese version of the *Ramayana* is an important book of Siamese), and besides there is a rich literature of romances and fairy stories as well as what may be called novels of love and fighting, and intrigue and adventure. Modern Siamese also boasts of a fairly extensive literature.

One language allied to Siamese, namely Ahom, was current in Assam. But by the beginning of the 19th century Ahom gradually died out. The Ahoms have finally become Hindus, but some of the priests of their old religion kept up some traces of the old pre-Hindu Ahom religion. The Ahoms brought their own system of writing from North Burma. This writing is ultimately of Indian origin, and there are manuscripts in the Ahom language in this alphabet. Old Ahom coins of Assam have legends in the Ahom language in this script. The Ahom people had a great historical sense, and the modern Assamese word for 'History' in the Aryan Assamese language, which is a sister of Bengali, is *Buranji* which is an Ahom word—the Sanskrit word *Itihāsa* is not so current. Some of the Ahom *Buranjis* have been published by the British Government, and one may particularly mention an important Ahom history of Assam printed in the Ahom character with an English translation by Rai Bahadur Golap Chandra Barua, published in 1903. Since the Ahom speech is now extinct, only some old men here and there keeping up a

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smattering knowledge of a few Ahom words and phrases, it has ceased to have any literary development.

As said before, in the Tibeto-Burman family in India only two languages developed important literatures. They are *Newari* of Nepal and *Manipuri* or *Meithei* of Manipur.

Newari

(1) *Newari*: Newari is the most important and most cultivated Tibeto-Burman language of Nepal. It is spoken in the valley of Nepal, and its four centres are the cities of Kathmandu, the present capital of Nepal, and Patan or Lalita Patan, Kirtipur, and Bhatgaon. Kathmandu is now the centre of the Nepali or Khaskura-speaking Gurkhas, and Newari has been very much under the influence of this Khaskura language which is the official language of the Hindu Gurkha kingdom of Nepal. The word *Nepāla* itself, of unknown origin (very likely Tibeto-Burman), was the original name of the Nepal valley, and the word *Newār* is a modern transformation of this form *Nepāla* or *Nepāl*, which seems to have been current some 1500 years ago. From *Nepāla* we have *Newār*, and now this word is commonly written as *Newāḥ*. The present day Newars call this language *Nepāla-bhāṣā*. The Tibeto-Burman people of this Nepal valley seem to have been very much mixed up with Aryan speakers from the south, and we have, like the present-day Gurkhas, quite early in the history of Nepal the evolution of some mixed Tibeto-Burman-Aryan tribes or peoples, who called themselves Kshatriyas but who evidently were mixed Aryo-Mongoloids, in race and speech and culture. Thus we have in North Bihar the Vrijjis or Vajjis, the Licchavis and the Sakyas or Koliyas, in the Nepal-Mithila border and also in the interior of Nepal. These peoples, very largely of Tibeto-Burman origin with an Aryan veneer in the upper classes, developed a mixed language which was Aryan in its basis, although very largely Tibeto-Burman in syntax and vocabulary. But they had come within the orbit of Indian civilisation and

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thought-world both Brahmanical and Buddhist. Some of the remoter tribes had maintained their Tibeto-Burman language, which was an earlier form of the present-day Newari. But this language became saturated with Sanskrit and other Aryan elements. . They became followers of Buddhism at least from the time of Asoka. They studied Sanskrit and Pali and other Aryan languages, and their greatest contribution to the culture of India was that this ancient Nepala or Newar people has been instrumental in preserving large masses of Mahayana Buddhist literature in what is known as Hybrid Sanskrit or Buddhist Sanskrit. This literature is not found in other parts of India, and it was very largely translated into the languages of the various Mahayana Buddhist peoples—Chinese and Japanese, Tibetan and Mongol. King Amsu-varman of Nepal, who ruled about 650 A.D., had close connection with both Tibet and China. His daughter Bhrikuti was married to the Tibetan king Srong-btsan-sgam-po. As already Nepal had become a land of Indian culture, there are Sanskrit inscriptions which are found in Nepal from this period onwards.

The masses of the people in Nepal valley unquestionably spoke Newari. But there is no literature in Newari preserved which goes back beyond the second half of the 14th century. We have the oldest specimen of a Newari text dating from 1360 A.D., which is given in the Nepal era. The previous history of Newari for over 2000 years is virtually a blank, although the Newari people studied Sanskrit and preserved a Sanskrit literature in the ancient East Indian script—the Kutila. We have however evidence of quite a flourishing literature in later times in Newari from a whole range of manuscripts which have come down to us, dating from the last quarter of the 17th century. All these manuscripts, as much as manuscripts in Sanskrit, are written in the same old Newari script, which is almost identical with that of Mithila, Assam and Bengal and of Orissa in the earliest period.

The oldest book in Newari so far found is a historical one, being a *Vaṃśāvali* or Genealogy of Kings, and this is found in a manuscript on palm-leaf, in three parts, which goes back

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to 1388 A.D. This Newari work, although utilised by scholars in the Ms., has not yet been published. Later adaptations of this *Vaṃśāvalī* in both Newari and the Aryan Khas-kura are available. But there is no good edition. The oldest Newari text so far available in print is the *Vicitra-Karṇikāvadānoddhṛta,* edited and published in Roman transcription with an English Translation and Glossary and Index, by the Danish scholar Hans Joergensen from the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland in London in the year 1931. This is a Newari translation of a Mahayana Buddhist work on Buddhist legends. The ms. used dates only from 1873, but the work is considerably older and may be of the 17th century. Long before the publication of this work, we have August Conrady's *Sanskrit-Newari Dictionary* published in the German Oriental Society's Journal (ZDMG), from Berlin in 1893. This is the first considerable work on Newari. In 1936, Hans Joergensen brought out from Copenhagen his *Dictionary of Classical Newari,* (pp. 1-13, 17-178); and then he published from Copenhagen an edition of the *Vetāla-pañcaviṃśati* as preserved in a ms. dating from 1674, printed in Roman characters some time after 1936. Other early texts in Newari in manuscripts from the end of the 17th century to recent years in the 19th century consist mostly of translations from Sanskrit works—Buddhist Mahayana texts, as well as of some Sanskrit works like the *Nārada Smṛti,* the *Hitopadeśa,* and the *Madana-Vinoda,* which is a religious romance, the *Cāṇakya-sārasaṅgraha,* the *Vaidyāṅga* or a book on Ayurvedic Medicine, the *Śuka-saptati* or the Seventy Tales told by a Parrot. A full inventory of early Newari literature, and a study of the works available in it, have not yet been made.

After the conquest of the valley of Nepal including its four beautiful cities of Kantipur or Kathmando, Kirtipur, Patan or Lalita-patan, and Bhatgaon, during the second half of the 18th century, by the Hindu Gorkhas under their king Prithwi Bir Bikram Sah from Palpa in Western Nepal, the Buddhist Newars, who were the original people of Central Nepal and who had built up the culture of Nepal, suffered from a great check and they were placed under a number of disabilities.

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Their Mahayana and Tantrika Buddhism was not interfered with, but all patronage to their language and its literature was stopped, and Khas-kura, or Nepali or Gorkhali, an Aryan speech allied to Hindi, as the official and home language of the conquerors, came to have a predominance over all the Tibeto-Burman Hill Speeches. Literature in Newari, even though it was the most advanced speech of Nepal all through, languished for nearly 200 years. Its own script was never cast in type, and Nagari, in which Gorkhali is written and printed, took up its place. Towards the end of the rule of the Rana family in Nepal (1846-1951), there was even an attempt among some sections of the ruling Gorkhas to suppress and if possible to stamp out Newari. No Newari was taught in schools, and no Newari books were allowed to be printed; and even Newari songs were tabooed in public.

After the restoration of the Royal Family of Nepal, the Sah Dynasty—and the removal of the all-powerful family of the Prime Minister (the Ranas) from the scene, by 1955 Newari with other Tibeto-Burman languages came to its own. Newari began to be taught in schools and colleges, and was recognised in the University of Kathmandu (Tribhuvan University) as a language at par with Gorkhali or Parbatiya, Maithili, Hindi etc.; and as a principal language in the B.A. (Pass and Honours) and M.A., courses were started in Newari. Newari books and papers began to be published without any difficulty. The result was that a number of Newari books have begun to come out, and we have now a *Modern Phase of Newari Literature* which has been taken up quite enthusiastically by some of the educated Newari people. Present-day or Current Newari literature follows in the main the general trend of literature in Parbatiya and Hindi and Bengali, only there are books on Buddhism, both Hinayana and Mahayana, which are being brought out in Newari as its speakers are mostly Buddhist. The first great writer in Newari in the present age was the poet Siddhi-das (1867-1929), who was greatly influenced by the literary and cultural renaissance in India. He visited Benares and Calcutta, and came particularly under the influence of Swami Vivekananda. His best works are

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Sajjan-hriday and *Sarva-bandhu*. Among present-day Newari writers one person can be singled out: he is a very distinguished poet, and also an outstanding prose writer of Newari, Sri Chittadhar Upasak ('Hriday'). He is one of the leaders of the present-day Newari revival in literature. Some 11 volumes of poems (of which some like the *Degah* or Pagoda have English translations), besides short stories, essays, one-act dramas etc. from his works, have been published, and his most important work so far is a long epic or narrative poem *(mahākāvya)* in a devotional and romantic vein on the life of the Buddha—the *Sugata-Saurabha* (Nepal Year 1069 = 1942 A.D.). This is a poem of about 7000 lines, in 19 cantos, with illustrations by the Newari artist Chandrabhan Maske, and it gives in beautiful modern Newari the life of Buddha as based on the *Lalita-Vistara* and other Buddhist Sanskrit texts. His other poetical works are very well known. He visited China, and he published a fine book on his Chinese travels (*Mahācīne Nepāla-Saṃskṛti*) in Newari in 1958.

Other Newari writers are coming to the forefront. There is a *Nepal Bhasha Parishad* for the development of Newari literature in Kathmandu. Over 30 books have already been published by the Parishad, and one of these is the *Nepāl-Bhāṣāyā Nahli Kavitā* or 'Poems of Today in the Newar Speech' (1958), giving poems from 21 men and women poets of Newari, with English translation and biographical notes. Tirtharaj Tuladhar is a prominent writer of prose. His *Akhe* is a volume of 29 short stories from different national literatures of the world, translated from English versions (published Nepal Year 1085 A.D. 1968). The position of Newari as one among the many modern Indian languages is now assured, and we can look forward to its development and still greater development in literature.

(2) Among other Himalayan languages of the Tibeto-Burman family, the most important are the Tibetan dialects which are spoken in Sikkim and Bhutan. The Sikkim dialect is known as *Denjong-ke* and the Bhutan dialect as *Lho-ke*. They are modifications of the *Ü* (Dbus) or Lhasa speech. There is not much original literature in this, as the speakers are

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conscious of their dialects being just a form of Tibetan, and Tibetan is generally studied and cultivated.

(3) The Lepcha dialect is current in the state of Sikkim and in Darjeeling district. Till recently its immediate affinities were not known, but now it has been connected by Robert Shafer with the distant Naga group of the Tibeto-Burman speech-family in the east of Assam. But the general history and development of this branch of Tibeto-Burman are not clear. The Lepchas were mainly Buddhists, although many of them have now become Christians. The Lepcha monks, in the Tibetan tradition, have a distinctive literature of Buddhist religious texts and law books. The Christian missionaries have also translated portions of the Bible, and they have sought to create a literature of Christian hymns, side by side with Buddhist hymns. Lepcha has an alphabet of its own which is now falling into disuse. It was evidently inspired by the Tibetan script, but it is rather different from it. King Chakdor Namgye of Sikkim, born in 1686, is said to have created this alphabet out of a patriotic Lepcha feeling. The Lepchas are now on the decline, and they are merging among the Hindu Nepalis as well as other neighbouring peoples, and their literary life is almost at a stand-still.

(4) The Kirantis, the Rais and other tribes of Eastern Nepal have got a little oral or folk literature. An interesting work is the collection of Kiranti religious and mythological tradition which has been published under the title of *Kirāt-Mundhum* or *Kirạt-ko Veda*, i.e. the Religious and Social as well as Historical Traditions and Usages of the Kiranti people, collected in the Kiranti language and published in the Nagari character with a Nepali (Gorkhali) translation from Patna in 1971 by Iman Singh Chemjong, B.A. (pages 108).

Other Himalayan dialects have no literature worth mentioning.

Manipuri (Meithei)

(5) Among the remaining Tibeto-Burman languages, the most important, and in literature certainly of much greater

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importance than Newari, is the *Meithei* or *Manipuri* language. Manipuri is the official language of the State of Manipur, and for quite a long time it has been recognised by the University of Calcutta,—it was given a place in the curriculum of that University from the Matriculation to the Intermediate and right up to B.A. examination, Pass and Honours. The same recognition has been given to it by the University of Gauhati, so that Manipuri is a language which has an important status as a language of study and culture. At the present-day Manipuri is written in the Bengali-Assamese script—it is virtually the Bengali script, with one letter recently taken over from Assamese—the letter for *w*. Manipur had quite a separate alphabet of its own, which is found in old manuscripts, and it has also been put in type. But books are no longer printed in this old Manipuri script, the study of which has become a specialised subject for scholars and experts. From the time of King Gharib Newaz Singh of Manipur (1709-1748), the Manipuri people, through the influence of the Bengali Vaishnavas of Chaitanya School from Navadwip and Sylhet, accepted the Bengali script for their language (c. 1740), and now this has become fully established. This has enabled Manipuri to come in intimate touch with Bengali in its literature, and with Sanskrit. There is an attempt on the part of a small number of Manipuri patriots to revive the use of the old Manipuri script. But as it is a rather complicated system of writing, it does not seem to receive much support from the people.

The Manipuris, a Meithei people, became Hindus at least 2000 years ago; and in Manipur chronicles, which are mostly preserved in the Old Manipuri language and in the older script, we have a fairly detailed history of the Manipuri kings and their Hindu background. But early Manipuri literature prior to the middle of the 18th century is more or less a sealed book to the Manipuri public. Only Manipuri scholars—*Pandits*, who specialised in the language—know about this speech, the vocabulary of which is now quite archaic, and quite different from modern Manipuri. There are books like the *Numit-kappa*, narrating some old Manipuri legends, and there is a rich literature of chronicles as well as

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works on the movements of the tribes, in Manipur, which are all preserved in the Old Manipuri language. The *Manipuri Sahitya Parishad* and some individual scholars are doing very valuable work in bringing out editions of these books in the current Bengali-Assamese script, with translations or notes in modern Manipuri.

The beginnings of this Old Manipuri literature (as in the case of Newari) may go back to 1500 years, or even 2000 years, from now. It is said that there is a copper-plate inscription, of King Khongtekcha, invoking Sri Hari (i.e. Vishnu with Lakshmi), Siva and Devi, dating from 721 Saka=c.790 A.D. But that is problematical, as the king is said to have ruled the Meitheis from 763 to 773 A.D. The late Yumjao Singh thought that the *Poiraiton Khunthok*, a prose-work describing the settlement of some Meithei tribes, is the oldest work in Manipuri, going back to the 3rd century A.D. A rich literary tradition is said to have existed during the closing centuries of the first millennium A.D. The *Cheitharol Kumbaba* is one of the oldest Manipuri Court Chronicles (*Kumbaba—kum* means 'year', now obsolete, and *baba* or *paba* means 'accounts'). This gives a traditional history of Manipur from the second century A.D. onwards. The *Numit-kappa,* as mentioned before, gives us some old pre-Hindu mythological tales.

It may be said that this early Manipuri literature, although it is fairly extensive, has not as yet been scientifically studied, and we are not sure about the dates when the individual works, as available now, were first written or compiled. As a preliminary step, full lists of these books of Early Manipuri are being prepared and published by Manipuri scholars. But we know that the sixteenth century A.D. was a great period for the development of Manipuri prose literature of histories and chronicles. The *Nugban Pombi Luwaoba* narrates the legendary history of the hero after whom the book is named, and of his beloved wife Koubru Namyno. This legend relates the story of the restoration to life of Koubru, the Gods being moved by the love of the husband for his departed wife.

The *Leithak Leikharon* gives an account of the Manipuri story of the creation. This book deals with the history of the Meithei

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Gods and Goddesses, and the songs and dances connected with them. In certain parts of this work, which is very distinctive, there are lists of the Muslim Pathan kings of Bengal, which shows that it is rather late in origin.

The *Chainarol* gives us a collection of some romantic and heroic stories of ancient times in the history of Manipur.

The 'National Romantic legend of Manipur'—the great love-story of Prince Khamba and Princess Thoibi, which, after a happy union of the two lovers ended in a tragedy,—began to be treated in Old Meithei ballads from the middle of the twelfth century. The lovers lived about 1130 A.D. during the rule of King Loyamba. These ballads used to be sung by wandering minstrels to the accompaniment of the one-stringed fiddle called the *pena*, and this old body of romantic ballads was later treated into the great epic romance of 34,000 lines by a modern Meithei poet, the late Hijom Anganghal Singh, about 1940.

The *Ningthouron Lambuba* is a historical work giving an account of the military expansions of the kings of Manipur. It is in a way a book which supplements the *Cheitharol Kumbaba*. A most interesting work is the romantic tale of prince Nompokninghou and princess Panthoibi, the daughter of King Ching-Ningthou. They fell violently in love with each other, and although Panthoibi was later on married to a chief named Khaba, her husband was frightened of her, and never dared approach her. The lovers met, but their career was cut short. This story has been sublimated as a religious myth—the hero was considered to be an incarnation of Siva, and Panthoibi was Parvati incarnate, and it was a case of *parakīyā* love as between Krishna and Radha which is a very vital mystico-philosophical doctrine with Gaudiya Vaishnavism of Navadwip, which again is the accepted from of Vaishnavism in Manipur. This work, in Old Manipuri, of unknown date, has been published with translation in Modern Manipuri.

There are similar other books in Manipuri which mostly go back to the times before the beginning of Gaudiya Vaishnava influence from Bengal and the influence from North India through the Ramanandi *sadhu* missionaries, from the beginning of the 18th century.

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From the reign of Gharib Newaz (c. 1740), a new period began in the history of Manipur, and in Manipuri literature also. The *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, as the most pupolar and in a way the most important texts of Hinduism, began to be rendered into Manipuri. Manipuri adopted a version of the *Ramayana* from the Bengali work of Krittivas. Portions of the *Mahabharata*—the Adi, the Virata and the Aswamedha Parvans, were also rendered into Manipuri. The older literary tradition suffered from a set-back, owing to the ill-conceived action of the Ramanandi missionary Santadas Babaji, whose vandalism in getting together and burning a number of Old Manipuri mss. appears to have received the support of Gharib Newaz; and this continued during the 18th century. But a few books in the old style were still written. One of these is a book known as the *Langan*. It is of the nature of *niti*-literature, in Sanskrit, and has been recently published.

King Bhagya Chandra Singha of Manipur (c. 1780) brought in a great Vaishnava revival. One might say that the confluence of the early period and the modern characterised Manipuri literature took place during the second half of the 18th century. There were books in a new *genre* or style like travel-books (e.g. the work describing the pilgrimage of King Bhagya Chandra), and genealogical works also came into being. King Bhagya Chandra with the help of his daughter, who was a great devotee of Krishna (she has been called the 'Mira Bai' of Manipur), sublimated Manipuri folk-dance (the *Laiharaoba*, a Dance of Creation) into an emotional and a religious creation of a very high artistic and spiritual beauty and merit which has now been accepted by the rest of India—the *Manipuri Rasa*. Treatises on Manipuri dance and music were compiled in both Sanskrit and Manipuri.

There are also Old Manipuri texts on Medicine and Medicinal Herbs of Manipur, as well as Tantric works on the cure of diseases, besides works on Astrology. These all show Brahmanical Hindu inspiration and influence.

There is a sort of a national archive for the most exalted families of Manipur, which is preserved in the court of the Maharaja of Manipur—the *Sangai Phamang*, which is regularly

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brought up-to-date. It is of great historical value for Manipur.

A syncretism of the old Pre-Hindu Meithei religion, mythology and ritual with the Hindu Brahmanical (Puranic) religion, mythology and ritual started very early; and with the friendly co-operation of the *Maibas* and *Maibis* (priests and priestesses of the Old Meithei religion) on the one hand and the Brahmans and Vaishnavas on the other for some centuries, gave to Manipur its own distinctive form of Hinduism. Dance as a ritual became a very beautiful expression of it. Old Meithei Gods and Goddesses and their myths were identified with Puranic deities and myths, and Puranic and Vaishnava ideologies were assimilated.

The first Secondary (i.e. High English) School was founded by Major-General James Johnstone, and was reorganised and fully established at Imphal in 1891, and it was later on affiliated to the University of Calcutta, until the establishment of the University of Gauhati in 1924. Meithei boys reading in this school followed the curriculum of Calcutta University, which had made Sanskrit a compulsory subject (in addition to the mother-tongue) for all Hindu students. Thus more than two generations at least of Manipuri school-boys had to know some Sanskrit. There was a very deep religious faith among the Manipuris for the Vaishnava philosophy and way of life, and in the Hinduism as inculcated in the Puranas; and this, with the help of the Sanskrit Pandits, and also the Bengali-Assamese Script of Manipuri, helped to make modern Meithei or Manipuri literature and culture entirely Sanskrit-oriented, almost as much as Bengali, Assamese and Hindi.

The modern period of Manipuri really came into existence with the beginning of the 19th century, after English education had found a place among the Manipuri people. European officials and missionaries who came to Manipur, and Bengali teachers, helped the Manipuris to build a new literature in their language—men like the Rev. W. Pettigrew, Mr. Wince, Babu Ramsundar Roy, and educated Manipuris like Makar Singh, Munal Singh, Jatiswar Singh and Haodijam Chaitanya Singh came forward. The first Manipuri book to be printed was a *History of Manipur,* which came out in 1890 in the Bengali script,

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and at first the new literature in Manipur could consist only of text-books in different subjects. Then with the growth of a school-educated class, other types of literature came in. Maharaja Churachand Singh (1891-1941) was a great patron of Manipuri literature. New books are being written and published in all sorts of subjects, including most of the common types of literature. And a special aspect of modern Manipuri literature is its wealth of translations from Sanskrit. In this matter, Manipuri will be the envy of many other languages of modern India which are spoken by millions of people.

The *Manipuri Sahitya Parishad* has published a list of Manipuri books printed from 1891 to 1969: the total number of titles comes up to 1078. It has been claimed that the number can easily come to 2000, as the list is not complete. The subjects include Manipuri History, Hindu Religion and Philosophy, Translations (from Sanskrit, from Bengali, from English), Biographies, old Manipuri Culture and Institutions, Social Sciences (Politics, Education, Law), Grammar and Linguistics (including study of Sanskrit Grammar and Rhetoric and Prosody), the Art of the Dance, Music, General Works on Literature including History of Literature, Fiction (Novels and Short Stories), Poetry, Anthologies, Literary Criticism, Scientific Fiction, Essays, Juvenile and Children's Literature, Humour, Geography, Autobiographies, Indology, Handicrafts and Technology, Sexual Science, and Miscellaneous. Thus most of the departments of literature which are found in any advanced language are represented in Manipuri, and works of creative literature like Poetry and Fiction are quite in abundance.

It would perhaps be most convenient for our purpose to give the names of the most outstanding personalities in Manipuri literature in its modern period covering half a century. First of all I give the names of the great translators, from Sanskrit and Bengali in the first instance, and then from English. It was they who transformed the mind and spirit of the Manipuris by extending the horizon of their literary experience, and made them familiar with some of the greatest things in Indian literature, ancient and modern. They brought the Manipuris in line with the rest of advanced India in their thought and ideas and

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aspirations.

The greatest name in the history of Manipuri literature, particularly in this line is that of Panditaraja Phurailatpam Atombapu Sarma Sahityaratna (1878-1963). He was great in so many departments of life and letters—great as a Sanskrit scholar who made translations into Manipuri of a number of outstanding religious and other texts from the Language of the Gods (like the *Bhagavata-Purana* and the *Bhagavad-Gita,* the *Gita-govinda, Gopala-sahasra-nama,* the *Markandeya-Candi,* the entire *Sarasvata* Grammar of Sanskrit with a Meithei commentary, portions of the Rigveda, besides any number of religious and ritualistic texts). Over and above this he brought out interpretations and editions of Old Manipuri texts on history, literature and the dance, and general works on Sanskrit and Manipuri culture. He was a giant among scholars, and at the same time he was a religious teacher, an educationist, a great publisher of works in Manipuri, and a political leader who led his people in the path of freedom from both British interference and Manipuri medievalism. His illustrious example was followed by other scholars, like Chingangbam Kalachand Singh who brought out his Manipuri translation of the entire Sanskrit *Mahabharata* (together with the Sanskrit text) in 21 volumes, besides other works, and a long poem of 12,000 lines on the life of Krishna (*Vāsudeva-Carita*). Haobam Iboyaima Singh, a veteran scholar, translated all the writings of the Bengali poet Michael Madhusudan Datta, besides some of the works of Sarat Chandra Chatterji, and a good many Sanskrit works. Apart from these three names, there are dozens of other scholars who made Sanskrit and Bengali literature in their most important works available in Manipuri. One can read the Bengali philosophical classic of Vaishnavism, Krishnadas Kaviraja's *Caitanya-Caritamrita,* as well as most of the novels of Bankim Chandra Chatterji, a good many of those by Sarat Chandra Chatterji and of other famous writers of Bengali (including a recent literary celebrity like *Jarāsandha*) in Manipuri. So Shakspere and Ibsen, Tolstoy and Prem Chand, Vivekananda and Gandhi, Rabindranath and Kalidasa, can at least in some of their important works be read in Manipuri. (A fine translation, by a nambar of scholars and poets, of a represen-

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tative selection of poems, songs, dramas and stories from Rabindranath Tagore into Manipuri—the *Rabindra Nacom*, has recently been published by the *Sahitya Akademi* of Delhi).

In creative literature, the following are the most important names. In fiction (novels and short stories): Dr. Lamabam Kamal Singh, whose romantic-realistic social novel *Mādhavī* published in the thirties of this century, was a pioneer work; Hijom Anganghal Singh (1894-1939), who was great as a poet (his epic-romantic poem on the love-story of Khamba and Thoibi in 34000 lines, c. 1940, has been mentioned before—the *Khamba Thoibi Shoireng*—he has other volumes of poetry also), and who also wrote some fine novels (one of which, *Jahera*, is on the theme of the love between a Manipuri Hindu young man and a Muslim girl), as well as some dramas (*Ibemma* etc.); R.K. Shitaljit Singh, author of some novels with a moral and religious purpose like the *Thadokpa*, besides the *Ima* and *Rohini*; Khwairakpam Chaoba Singh (his historical novel of *Labangalatā* dealing with the period 1597-1652 A.D. is quite popular); Hijom Guno Singh, a living writer (his four novels are very popular); Srimati Takhellabam Thoibi Devi (authoress of *Rādhā*, a romantic novel); K. Elengbam Rajani Kanta Singh (author of *Marup Ani*); Sansenbam Nadiya-Chand Singh; Khumantham Ibohal Singh; and quite a number of others. Want of space prevents the mention of other novelists and short-story writers of note who are making Manipuri literature quite rich, including the group of fine translators of works of fiction from Bengali, English and other languages (e.g. Ayekpam Syam-sundar Singh, translator of the novels of Bankim Chandra).

The drama is a literary form particularly dear to the heart of the Manipuris. In Imphal city, with a population not exceeding 2 lacs, there are half of a dozen regular play-houses where plays in Manipuri (original dramas, or translations or adaptations from Bengali and English) are regularly shown—the cinema, numbering also half a dozen, has not been as yet able to kill off the regular stage. Eminent dramatists and histrionic artists have come into existence. The first plays were adapted from Bengali; and it was only in 1905 that the first Manipuri drama, by a Bengali school-teacher, the *Pagolini*, was staged.

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Among noted playwrights are Sorokhaibam Lalit Singh, Mayanglambam Bir-mangal Singh (author of over a dozen plays, based, like the *Pidonnu*, on Old Manipur history and life, and also on Puranic as well as modern themes), Tongbram Gitchandra Singh (over two dozen plays, including some translations from Shakspere, G. Bernard Shaw and Henrik Ibsen), Maibam Ramcharan Singh (some 20 plays),Haobam Tomba Singh, Lairenmayum Ibungohal Singh, Raj-Kumari Binodini Devi, and a number of others. The Manipuri drama is quie a convincing example the high quality and attractivenes of the culture of Manipur.

In pure poetry, in literary and other essays, in historical studies, and in all other domains of literature, Manipuri has quite a rich harvest of books to show. Recently, Professor Rajkumar Sri Surendrajit Singh has brought out a very comprehensive work in Manipuri on Prosody and Metre (1969). It is only unfortunate that so far no English translations (or translations in other Indian languages) of at least some of the outstanding classics of Manipuri are available, although Manipuri scholars, mostly Professors in the Manipur colleges as well as officials of the State, are not lagging behind in writing helpful books in English on the history and literature of their State, and also on certain aspects of their local culture.

Manipuri literature is most emphatically an advanced Modern Indian literature, and cannot be described as the backward literature of so-called Adiaasi or primitive peoples—the manipuri writers are already in the front line of modern Indian writing and translation.

Bodo

(6) Among the Sino-Tibetan (Tibeto-Burman) languages of India, some reference must be made to the very important *Bodo* (or *Boro*) group of speeches. These at one time were current throughout the entire valley of the Brahmaputra, and in North Bengal upto Northern Bihar, and in East and South-east Bengal. Now this very extensive Bodo *bloc* is broken up through the intrusion of the Aryan Assamese and Bengali. The Assam-

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Bengal Bodo speeches are the(now extinct) Rajbansi, (or Koch), the Mech, the Rabha, the Dima-sa or Kachari, the Chutiya, the Garo, the Old Haijong, and the Tipra (or Tripura) Dialect. These go very close to each other, and are largely mutually intelligible. But barring some folk-tales and songs, the native literature in these Bodo dialects has been very meagre so far. The Bodo speakers of Assam are now falling in line with the Assamese-speaking Hindus of the Brahmaputra Valley, but are nevertheless trying to rehabilitate their language, and to create a literature in it. A half yearly journal called the *Alari* or 'Divine Light' printed in the Asssamese alphabet, is coming out from 1959 from the *Bodo Literary and Cultural Society*, Gauhati, with serious articles of the type found in Assamese and Bengali journals of repute. A scholar and ethnologist, musician and folklorist, poet and writer like the late Bishnu Rabha was a great exponent of Bodo culture, like the family of the late Rupanath Brahma, a fromer Minister of Assam. Assamese scholars of Bodo are also helping, and Bodo writers are coming up. But not much advance has so far been made, although Bodo (Kachari) is being taught in the primary schools in Assam.

The state of Tripura is seeking to create a literature in the Tipra form of Bodo, and broadcasts in Tipra are on the air several times a week. The ruling house of Tripura, Bodo (Tipra)-speaking to start with, became oriented towards Bengali and Sanskrit from the end of the 15th century, and they made Bengali the official language of the State centuries ago. Tipra is now spoken by a small minority, and it is split up into several dialects, and its future development is beset with many difficulties. The same thing may be said for Garo, another Bodo speech, although it has acquired some status as the language of a part of the new *Meghalaya State*, and has some interesting folk-tales, as well as a Christian literature (though not very extensive) to boast of.

(B) The Austric Languages of India : (a) Kol or Munda, and (b) Khasi

These languages are spoken by groups of people, erstwhile backward, but now they are very rapidly being integrated with

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the general mass of the Indian people, and are attaining to the same or similar cultural status with the rest of the people; and in some cases they are making very great advances, so that they are no longer to be described as *Adivasi* or 'Primitive' or 'Aboriginal'. The Austric languages were spoken in India in very ancient times, and already we have references to them in the oldest Sanskrit literture. They were spread all over the riverain plains of India, particularly the Gangetic and possibly also the Indus basins; and they contributed to the village culture of India based on agriculture—e.g. the cultivation of rice and of a number of vegetables and fruits (like the gourd or the pumpkin, the brinjal, the bananas, the mango and the jack-fruit), and condiments like the ginger, the turmeric and the pepper; and they raised poultry and pigs; and it was they who possibly tamed the elephant for the first time. A great many of their religious ideas and rituals and ceremonies have continued down to our times, having been absorbed in a composite Aryan-non-Aryan culture which is at the basis of Hinduism. They were known in ancient Sanskrit as *Nishādas*, and some of their tribes were also called *Bhillas* and *Kollas* (=modern Indian *Bhil* and *Kol*), besides *Pulindas*, *Mātangas* (=modern Indian *Māng*), *Sāmana-palas* (=modern *Saontals*,or *Santals*), *Muṇḍas* (=modern *Mundaris*) and *Puṇḍras* (=modern Indian *Puṇḍ*) etc., etc. Their languages did not evolve any high literature, but remained as they were in ancient times in a rather primitive state, although a good many words from the Nishada or Austric languages have found a place in Indo-Aryan—the various Prakrits and Sanskrit as well as in the present-day New Indo-Ayran speeches. Apart from these words, which are sometimes very difficult to identify because of their mutilation in form through the ages, we do not have any records of these Nishada languages. Nishada-speakers have gradually merged into the general mass of the Aryan-speaking people in North India, and in some areas they have become Dravidian-speakers also. In the Himalayan regions, when they came within the orbit of the Mongoloids, they took up Mongoloid dialects to a limited extent.

The Austric languages began to be studied for the first time from the beginning of the last century when European scholars

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became interested in these languages, and they began to study them and to find out their affinity or relationship with the other Indian languages. Brian Hodgson was one of the pioneers in the study of these *Adivasi* languages, both Austric and Mongoloid, at the beginning of the last century. Then the Christian missionaries came in—there were Roman Catholic missionaries from Germany and Belgium, Protestant Lutherans from Germany and from Norway and Sweden, and Anglicans and Baptists from Great Britain, and Methodists from Wales. They began to study from the middle of the last century the Austric languages, and their objective was to render the Christian scriptures and some Christian literature in these languages with a view to convert the primitive *Adivasis* to Christianity. But they did a great service in introducing a proper scientific study of these languages. At first it was thought that the Austric languages and the Dravidian speeches belonged to the same family. But by 1860, Max Mueller and others established their separate identity.

The various Austric tribes of North India—the so-called 'Kolarians'—i.e. the Kol or Munda tribes—are confined mainly to North-Eastern India, in the Chota Nagpur Plateau and in the contiguous areas in South Bihar, Western Bengal and North Orissa. Besides, they are found to some extent in Madhya-Pradesh, and in South Orissa, and in the Telugu border also. In the Berar tract in Madhya-Pradesh, a very important tribe of these are the Korkus; and in Rajasthan and Malwa and North Gujarat, there were large masses of Kolarians known as Bhillas or Bhils, who are now Aryan in speech speaking Rajasthani and Gujarati; but they retained their name and identity, and are not yet fully integrated with the rest of local population.

All these tribes had just a little oral literature, handed down from generation to generation, consisting of their mythological and semi-historical legends and traditions,and some folk-poetry, partly relating to their religious ceremonies, but mainly with regard to the life they used to live. This poetry as well as their oral legends have a unique literary value. A good deal of their mythology and ritual, as said before, has been transformed and passed into the mass of Hindu Purana legends. But the matter

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requires deeper and more detailed investigation. The recording of all this oral literature started from the fourth quarter of the last century, before which the various Christian missionary bodies tried to give to the Austric tribes some Christian literature—translations of the Gospels and other portions of the Bible, and some Christian hymns and other works.

Santali

Among the Austric languages of the present day the most important is *Santali*, which is spoken by between 3 to 4 million people. Their original home was in the Chota Nagpur plateau, in the Santal Parganas area and in the contiguous tracts round about in Bihar, West Bengal, and North Orissa. They have also been taken as indentured labourers to the tea-gardens of Assam and North Bengal, where they now form a settled population, very slowly merging into the surrounding Assamese and Bengali speakers. But in Bengal there is a noteworthy group of Santals who have not accepted the Christian religion but follow their own national religion, which in a way is akin to Puranic Hinduism, and being within the orbit of Brahmanism, they have been very largely influenced by Hindu notions. Although they have retained their language, culturally and mentally (and even spiritually) they are becoming just like other Bengali-speaking Hindus, adopting Bengali Hindu personal names, but retaining their Santal surnames. The same can be said to a lesser extent of the Santals in Bihar and in Orissa.

The Santals never had a script of their own, and Santali was first written down in the Bengali script, missionaries and others also using the Bengali script (and to a slight extent the Oriya and Nagari scripts also, in Orissa and Bihar). Then through Christian missionary initiative, the Roman alphabet was adopted for Santali, and a rich literature of mythological tales, traditions and folk-tales as well as of folk-songs has been collected and published in the Roman script through both missionary and non-missionary enterprise, some Bengali scholars having also taken an initiative in this.

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Santali literature may be classified into two main types : (1) the earlier primitive literature based on oral tradition; and (2) the modern literature which is being created by educated Santals, and that is on the model of the literatures in the Aryan languages, particularly Bengali and Oriya and to some extent Hindi. The second type of literature has not any special Santali character about it. But nevertheless it is in the field now, and it is making good progress.

There are two great works in Santali, giving collections of their traditions and legends. These are (1) *Hor-ko-ren Mare Hapram-ko-reak' Katha*, or 'the Traditions of the Ancestors of the Hor or Santal People". These are old Santali traditions which were given out by a Santal *guru* or preacher named Kolean (Kalyan), and the Reverend A. Skrefrsud, a Scandinavian missionary belonging to the Santal Mission from the Northern Churches at Benagaria near Dumka in Santal Parganas, obtained this oral narration and then collected it all and published it in the Roman script as a book in the year 1887. This book was never translated into English, although it was used by many scholars; and only recently, it has been translated into good Bengali by Sri Baidya Nath Hansdak under the auspices of the Government of India Census Commission (under Sri Asok Mitra, I.C.S.), about the year 1965. This is one of the great compilations of Santali stories and legends in their earliest forms.

(2) Next, we have another Similar compilation as well as composition, but much more extensive in its content, made by another Santal gentleman named Ramdas Manjhi Tudu, from Ghatsila in Dhalbhum District. This old getleman was very well-informed about the traditions of his people and its religious and social culture, and his book is known as *Kherwāl-Bansa Dharam-Puthi*, or 'the Sacred Book of the *Kherwal* Race', (*Kherwāl* being an old name for the Santals and other allied Kol peoples). This book was published by him in the Bengali script, with a number of woodcut illustrations designed by him relating to Santali myths and social life, from Calcutta about the year 1902, and it has now become entirely out of print. Subsequently a reprint was made under the auspices of the

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Manager of the Dhalbhum Raj State at Ghatsila, the late Bankim Chandra Chakravarti, with a long introduction in Bengali by Suniti Kumar Chatterji. This book is now being brought out in a third reprint by Professor Suhrid Kumar Bhaumik, also in the Bengali script; and a Bengali translation with the Introduction is also being prepared.

These two books are very important for Munda or Kol legends or antiquities, and they form a sort of a source-book for Kol or Munda legends and antiquities as they have been preserved in Santali.

Next to these myths and religious traditions and usages, there is a long series of Santali folk-tales dealing mostly with Santali belief in the *Bongas* or Gods and Godlings, and giving very fine pictures of the primitive life of the Santal people in their jungle villages. The best collections of such stories were made by the Scandinavian missionaries, particularly by P.O. Bodding, who was one of the greatest authorities on Santal folk-lore and tradition. The British missionary A. Campbell also made a collection. Bodding's Santal folk-tales have been published in very convenient editions by the Institute for Comparative Folk-lore in Oslo, Norway, and also from Copenhagen, giving the Santali text in Roman script on one page and an English translation on the page opposite. The English civilian C.O. Bompas made an English translation of some of these folk-tales, which was long available to English readers—*The Folk-lore of the Santals,* David Nutt, London, 1908. We have in these folk-tales quite a good nucleus of a native Santali prose literature of very high value.

The Christian missionaries made a translation of the entire Bible, both the Old and the New Testament, and they published also some translations of some Christian religious classics like the *Pilgrim's Progress* of John Bunyan.

Over and above these folk-tales in prose, there is a rich mass of Santali lyrics. These are short poems, generally in couplets and sometimes in more than four to half a dozen lines. In these lyrics we find thumb-nail sketches of Santali life, and they have a beauty of their own. Collections have been made also by Bengali lovers of Santal lore, and mention

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may be made specially of a fine collection of Santali poems published in the Roman script under the editorship of W.G. Archer, when he was an I.C.S. officer with the Bihar Government, and these have been published by the Government of Bihar from Patna. Rabindranath Tagore also appreciated the poetic beauty of these Santali songs.

There was so long no literature of a modern type in Santali. But it is only recently, after there has come into being a school-educated group of Santals, particularly in Bengal, who are also graduates and college-educated men, and some of whom are in Government Service as well as in the Indian Army and in the Provincial Police Service, that we have an emulation of Bengali literature; and a genuine modern literature in Santali is now coming into being. This is hardly 40 years old. Already there are some Santal writers who have brought out volumes of short stories and general essays, published in the Bengali script or in the Roman, and there are poems in the usual modern Indian style on life as well as on religion, which are more or less in the same pattern as Bengali literature. Some translations from Tagore have appeared, and are regularly appearing. Versions of the Hindu Purana tales also occasionally come out, and there has appeared a translation of the *Isa Upanishad*. Literary journals have also made their advent, and mention may be made of the *Ebhen* or 'Light' (a quarterly literary journal), and *Hariyar Sakam* or 'the Green Leaf' (a weekly). These are printed in the Bengali character. Already some educated Santals, with whom Bengali is almost their second mother-tongue, are writing good poetry in Santali. Among such writers some two dozen outstanding names may be mentioned, like those of Naeke Mangal Chandra Soren, Sarada Prasad Kisku, Balkishor Baske, Aditya Mitra Saontali Babulal Murmu, Bhagavat Murmu, 'Taḍe Sutam', Raghunath Murmu, Rup-Narayan Hembrom, Sridhar Kumar Murmu, Gomasta Prasad Soren, Chandranath Murmu. Kaliram Soren (his drama *Sidhu Kānu* on a Santal Patriot has been staged, and is very popular—it is in its second edition). Jugaldas Mandi, Ramchandra Murmu, Mandal Hembrom, Durgacharan Hembrom, Hopon Chandra Baske, Bir-lita Hambrom,

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Rabilal Mandi, and Stephen Murmu, who are mostly poets and essayists; besides departed Santali writers of the previous generation, Sadhu Ramchand Murmu Thakur (religious reformer and teacher of a Santal philosophy of religion), Ramdas Tudu Reska (author of the *Kherwāl Bansa Dharam-Puthi* mentioned above), and Charu Chandra Sinha Soren (prose writer, of *Puraha* tales). There is a very great interest among educated Santals for the development of their language, and in this matter Christian Santals are as much interested as non-Christian Santals. On the basis of old Santali religious notions, and inspired by Hindu philosophy, a Santal philosophy of religion and of life is also developing, as conceived by Ramdas Tudu, Sadhu Ramchand Murmu Thakur and Mangal Soren. These are among the very hopeful signs of the development of Santali literature and thought at the present age.

The Santali language, as said before, started to be written in the Bengali script, and then the Roman was adopted and established for it. Santals are now forced to know more scripts than one: in Bengal, they must know the Bengali script, in Orissa the Oriya script, and in Bihar the Nagari script, and in Assam the Assamese script (which is the same as Bengali). For interprovincial purposes, Roman is the only suitable alphabet; and in the Roman script, by far the largest and most significant mass of Santali literature has already been published, thanks mainly to the Scandinavian missionaries. In Bengal, the Santals can get on very well with Bengali and the Roman. Everywhere the Santals form a very small minority community, which is economically as well as educationally backward, and therefore the knowledge of the local language with the local script is a *must* for them. Recently a Santali gentleman has come forward with a newly created alphabet of his own, called the *Ol* script. This is conceived in the same spirit as the Roman—each vowel and consonant sound has a separate letter. But the shapes of the letters are very complicated, compared with the Roman. A kind of Santali nationalism, the result of an inferiority complex fed by political partisanship, has pushed this alphabet to some prominence, and some Santals are advocating the use of this script

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for their language. But such a new script has absolutely no utility, and will be a drag on the progress of Santali language and literature. The Roman script has been a most effective and almost indispensable instrument for the writing and publishing of Santali, and this is serving its purpose admirably. A brand new alphabet, and a complicated one at that, will be another burden on Santali education and intellectual life. Fortunately, there is not much chance of its being universally adopted.

Next in importance to Santali is the *Mundari* language spoken by near a million of Mundas, who, like the Santals, are spread out in the four provinces of Bihar (Chota Nagpur), Orissa, Assam and to some extent Bengal also. The literary life of the Mundas goes parallelly to that of the Santals. Through Christian (Roman Catholic) missionary effort mainly, Mundari myths and legends as well as folk-tales have been collected and published in the Roman script. Mundas living in the Chota Nagpur have generally to learn the Nagari script which is used side by side with the Roman in writing Mundari. The late Sarat Chandra Roy made a very detailed study of Munda life and culture, and he collected some beautiful Mundari songs or poems. W. G. Archer is also responsible for a very good collection of Mundari poems (*Munda Durang*), published by the Government of Bihar. The total output of literature in Mundari, both the native oral literature as well as modern writing in Mundari, is not as extensive as in Santali. But Mundari songs, which are frequently longer in extent than Santali songs, are quite distinctive, and here they have a better output than Santali. A Christian literature in the shape of a translation of the Bible and some Christian texts has also grown up in Mundari.

The other Kol or Munda languages are not so very important, numerically and in other ways, and they generally follow the pattern of Santali and Mundari. There is still more restricted literary endeavour in these languages, like for example *Ho* or *Larka-Kol*, *Bhumij*, *Asur*, and the languages which are a little far-away from Bihar and West Bengal, like *Gadaba* (or *Patua*), and *Savara* (or *Sora*) which is the southernmost Munda

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language spoken in Orissa and the Telugu country, besides *Korku* in Vidarbha or Berar. These languages do not have any literature worth mentioning, excepting for some songs and folk-tales which are current orally.

Khasi

Finally, we have to speak of *Khasi*, which is spoken now in Khasi and Jayantia Hills, forming a part of the new Hill State *Meghālaya* in North-Eastern India. The Khasi people number over three and a half lacs, and they are in two main groups,—the Khasis proper in the West, and the Syntengs or Jaintias (or Jayantiyas) in the East. They are racially Mongoloids. But they have in very early times—when and how nobody knows—adopted the Austric Khasi language. They had their own religion and social life and customs, and their own distinctive socio-political organisations. They came under Hindu influence from Bengal through the Jayantiyas (ancestors of the present day Syntengs) in the South, and from the Assamese Hindus in the North. Barring a few traditional stories and folk-tales, and some songs, they did not have any literature worth mentioning. A good number of them became Hindus. But through the efforts of the Welsh Methodist missionaries, a very large percentage of them have now become Methodist Christians. Roman Catholicism is also spreading among them, and the monks of the Salesian order (founded by Saint Francis de Sales) from Italy are now working among the Khasis. Formerly the Khasi language was written in the Bengali script. But now through the efforts of the Welsh Missionaries, they have accepted the Roman, with Welsh values for some of the Roman letters.

Through their contact with Christianity, the Khasis have advanced much in education, though mainly through English. A little literature under Christian inspiration is growing up among them. There is of course the translation of the Christian scriptures into Khasi.

Contact with Hindusm is helping the Khasis to take a greater

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interest in their own religion, culture, and institutions, and some cultured Khasis who are not in all cases Christians have written in Khasi as well as in English on various aspects of their culture and social usages. The Khasis, as an intelligent and advanced people, have got a number of highly cultivated educationists and men in public life, and there is a great possibility of further development of Khasi literature.

Among Khasi writers and scholars, poets and dramatists at the present-day, who are building up a small modern literature in the language, we may note some important names. U Rabon Singh's book on the *Customs of the Khasis*, dealing with Khasi religious rituals and social usages, and his *Book of Legends*, giving collections of folk-tales, and Radhon Singh Berry's *Proverbs of the Ancients* (1902), as well as Nelson Jaid's work on old practices and observances, present a mass of folk-lore material for the study of Khasi life and culture. Sib Charan Roy's books on the Khasi Concept of God and Man and on Khasi Ethics are noteworthy works. *The History of the Khasis* (1914) by B. K. Sarma Roy is an up-to-date and authoritative work for the time. *Khasi Geography* (1920) by Ondro Muney deals also with economic, political, and social structure of Khasi society.

The work of U Rabon Singh, Sib Charan Roy and also of U Jeebon Roy in describing Khasi institutions and culture was continued by a number of other writers, particularly Dr. H. Lyngdoh whose work *The Prayer Dance and the Cremation of the Cherra Syiems* (1923) has been described as 'monumental'. This work 'explains in detail the political organization prevailing and the state ceremonies observed in the Khasi States.' In the Khasi political structure, the *Syiem* or Ruler has his peculiar place. In 1937 Dr. Lyngdoh brought out another great book on the political organisation as well as the religious ideas and beliefs of the Khasis, including the practice of the burial cromlechs, and belief in transmigration. Two Salesian (Italian) missionaries, J. Bacchiarello (in his *Foot-prints of Our Ancestors*, 1930) and G. Costa (in his work on the Concept of the *Syiemship*, 1936), continued this line of investigation. There is a small series of illustrated books in Khasi published from Shillong, giving short accounts of

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Khasi life and ways as they are at the present-day (by Theodore Cajee and others). R.M.R. Nongoum's *The Khasis in the Past* (1959) is a good *resume* of Khasi history and culture.

In modern literature, there are a few writers, and Soso Tham, known as 'the Khasi Wordsworth', is an outstanding poet and prosateur who has been quite an innovator in the Khasi language. His first work appeared in 1925. He is essentially a writer of Humanity as a whole. He is nevertheless a great admirer of the old life and ways of his people, which he has extolled in his *Ancient Days of the Seven Huts*. P. Gatphoh (author of *The Stag's Adventure,* describing the natural beauty of the hills), B. Thangkhien (his book of poems *Words and Songs* appeared in 1936), and Victor Bareh (*Poems,* published 1957) are the most distinguished poets and song-writers of Khasi at the present day. Victor Bareh is the author of a great patriotic drama on the life of U Tirot Singh (1956), a great Khasi freedom fighter who died in the English prison at Dacca. F. M. Pugh's Khasi translation of Shakespeare's *As You Like It* is a noteworthy work.

Khasi literature shows a striking advance in essays and journalism. From 1895 onwards, Khasi magazines began to come out—the *Khasi To-day* (edited by H. R. Diengdoh), *The Watchman* (editor U Jeebon Roy) and *Bright Star* (from 1903). The political and socio-economical writings of the Rev. J. J. M. Nichols Roy, B. M. Pugh's books on agriculture, S. Blah's pamphlets on the Flora of the hills, and Hamlet Bareh's book the *Freedom Movement in the Jaintia Hills*,are Khasi writings of this type.

This incomplete account (taken from Xerxes Lyngdoh's paper on Khasi Literature, *Hindusthan Standard,* Calcutta 5-7-1967 and 12-7-1967), just gives a brief indication of the modernisation of an interesting and important *Adivasi* language of the Austric Family in India.

(C) The Dravidian Adivasi Languages

As noted before, the Adivasi or Primitive languages of India belong mainly to the Sino-Tibetan and Austric families. But there are some backward tribes which speak Dravidian. They

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are, for example, the *Gonds* in Central India, who number over a million. At one time the Gonds had a little kingdom of their own, with its centre in Chanda in Madhya Pradesh, and they had Gond Kings, and a kind of Gond art (sculpture in stone) of their own which was quite distinctive. But they are now scattered and broken up, and live among various Aryan-speaking peoples as well as among Telugus who have penetrated into and settled within Gond territory. They do not cultivate their language to any appreciable extent, and it looks as if they would merge among their Aryan or Telugu neighbours surrounding them. The Gondi language is now broken up into a number of dialects which are sometimes mutually unintelligible.

Next we have the *Kurukh* or *Oraon* people. They live in Chota Nagpur, and their economic and social and cultural life is just like that of their close (Austric) neighbours, the Santals and the Mundas. Thousands of them have settled in Assam as labourers in tea-gardens, and also in North and South Bengal, and they are merging among Assamese and Bengalis. Their language *Oraon* is quite distinctive—it is an independent Dravidian language, and there is just a little oral literature in it. A good collection of Oraon poems and songs has been made by W. G. Archer and published in the Nagari script by the Government of Bihar from Patna. The *Blue Grove*, a fine book giving an English version of a series of beautiful traditional poems in Oraon, with notes and commentaries, has been published by W. G. Archer from London in 1940.

There is in West Bengal and Bihar, in the Raj Mahal Hills, another small tribe of Dravidians—the *Maler* or *Mal-Pahariyas*. Their language very much resembles *Oraon*. But they are a small and insignificant group, and they do not have any literature worth mentioning—barring, naturally, a few songs and folk-tales. In Orissa and Andhra countries there are a few other backward tribes speaking Dravidian. Thus we have the *Kandh* people in Orissa, who are known as *Kui* (or *Kuvi*). They are fast becoming merged among the Oriyas. Then there are the *Parjis* in Koraput, and these Parjis have a language which has its own place in the Dravidian family. But there

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is not much literature, excepting as usual some folk-tales, and there is no literary cultivation of this language. The same may be said of a few other very small tribes speaking Dravidian, in Koraput in Orissa and in Bastar in Madhya Pradesh.

This completes the tale of the *Adivasi* peoples of India and their languages and literatures.

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